

Landlord-Tenant Relations Board
Wednesday, March 6, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

301 King Street
Conference Room 2000
Alexandria, VA 22314

MEMBERS PRESENT: Valerie Ianieri, Jeanette Shepherd, Soomin Kim, Isabella Debono, Michelle Frazier, Alex Howe and Elliott Waters

MEMBERS ABSENT: Monique Banks

STAFF PRESENT: Gwen Lassiter, Melodie Seau

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Jeanette Shepherd called the meeting to order at 7:12PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No members of the public were present.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Shepherd asked for nominations for Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Board. Michelle Frazier made a motion to nominate Ms. Shepherd to be Chairperson and Valerie Ianieri for Vice Chairperson. The motion was seconded by Isabella Debono and passed unanimously.

UPDATE ON THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

Ms. Seau discussed recent legislative changes resulting from the 2019 session of the Virginia General Assembly. Ms. Seau said that as a result of the efforts of the Campaign to Reduce Evictions in Virginia (CARE) and a review of Virginia landlord tenant law and eviction information by the Virginia Housing Study Commission, several legislative changes were made in the 2019 General Assembly session. These are the new laws:

Written Leases Required. Under current law, a lease may be oral or written. An oral lease leaves both landlords and tenants uncertain about their rights and duties. Starting July 1, 2019, landlords must offer written leases. If the landlord does not, the law sets out a specific lease that will apply. This lease has these rules:

- The lease is 12 months with no automatic renewal.
- Rent is paid in 12 monthly payments.
- Rent is due on the first of the month and late after the fifth of the month.
- A reasonable late fee may be charged.
- The security deposit can be no more than two months' rent.
- The landlord and tenant still may enter into a written lease.

Code of Virginia §55-248.7.

One Case at a Time and Required Evidence. Under current law, a landlord may file an unlawful detainer (eviction) lawsuit due to nonpayment of rent for each month rent is claimed to be overdue. A landlord can file these lawsuits one after the other even if prior lawsuits are still undecided. This leads to increased fees – multiple court filing fees, and multiple attorney fees if an attorney is involved. Starting July 1, 2019, if nonpayment of rent is the only issue, a landlord may file only one lawsuit at a time. On request of the landlord, the judge must allow the lawsuit to be amended to cover all rent and fees claimed as of the trial date.

Under current law, a landlord is not required to have the court admit into evidence the notice that terminated or ended the tenancy. This means many tenants do not know the exact reason the landlord wants to evict them. Starting July 1, 2019, to get a judgment of possession and start the Sheriff's eviction process, the landlord must present the court with a proper termination notice that the court enters into evidence.

Code of Virginia §§55-248.40:1, 55-248.40:2 & 55-248.40:3.

Tenant Attorney's Fees in Poor Housing Condition Cases. Under current law, landlords usually may claim attorney's fees under the lease or by statute. Tenants have very few ways to do this. As a result, landlords can use the threat of attorney's fees in litigating with tenants. Starting July 1, 2019, attorneys who represent tenants and who win two types of cases involving poor housing conditions can get attorney's fees.

Code of Virginia §§55-248.25 & 55-248.27.

Extended Right of Redemption (Pay and Stay). Under current law, tenants get three chances to pay their rent late and stay. These chances end on the court date. Starting July 1, 2019, they will have a fourth and later chance.

- The first chance is within any grace period of the lease (if any). If the tenant pays the rent within the grace period, the tenant gets to stay. The tenant may do this any number of times.
- The second chance is after the grace period (if any) ends and before the landlord has filed an unlawful detainer (eviction) lawsuit. Usually this is the time during which the landlord has given the tenant a five day nonpayment notice. If the tenant pays the rent and the late fee during this time period, the tenant gets to stay. The tenant may do this any number of times.
- The third chance is after the landlord has filed an unlawful detainer (eviction) lawsuit and on or before the court date. This is called a redemption (pay and stay), or a redemption tender (offer to pay and stay).

A redemption means the eviction lawsuit must be dismissed as paid if the tenant pays the landlord, the landlord's attorney, or the court all amounts owed as of the court date. All amounts owed means all rent (including a new month's rent if that has come due), all late fees set forth in a written lease (including a new month's late fee if that has come due), court costs, and reasonable attorney's fees (if a landlord's attorney is involved).

A redemption tender means the tenant comes to court on the first court date and shows the judge a written commitment from a local government or non-profit agency to pay all or part of the redemption amount. If so, the judge must postpone the case ten days and allow the tenant to come back with the full redemption amount on that day. If so, the case is dismissed as paid. If not, the landlord gets an order of possession.

A tenant may do a redemption, or a redemption tender, only once in any 12 month period of time that the tenant continues to live in the same place.

- As of July 1, 2019, tenants will get a fourth and later chance to pay their rent late and stay, which is an extended right of redemption (extended right to pay and stay). If a judge decides in the landlord's favor, a judgment of possession is entered. After that, the landlord may ask the court to issue a writ of eviction. This writ goes from the clerk to the Sheriff to the tenant. It authorizes the Sheriff to evict on a specific date.

Under the extended right of redemption, the tenant can pay the landlord, the landlord's attorney, or the court all amounts owed as of two business days before the Sheriff's scheduled eviction date. All amounts owed means all rent (including a new month's rent if that has come due), all late fees set forth in a written lease (including a new month's late fee if that has come due), court costs, Sheriff's fees, and reasonable attorney's fees (if a landlord's attorney is involved). Payment must be by cashier's check, certified check, or money order. If so, the Sheriff's eviction is cancelled.

A tenant may do a redemption, a redemption tender, or an extended redemption, only once in any 12 month period of time that the tenant continues to live in the same place.

Code of Virginia §§55-248.34:1

Use Writ or Lose Writ of Possession. Under current law, once a landlord gets a judgment of possession, the landlord can use that for up to 12 months before getting the writ of eviction. This 12 month period, during which a landlord can trigger an eviction hangs, over the head of the tenant even if all rent has been paid current and the tenant is following the lease. Starting July 1, 2019, the timeframe is shortened to six months, giving both landlord and tenant greater certainty. Under current law, a writ of eviction that is not executed by the Sheriff simply expires after 30 days. Due to this, landlords do not know whether the tenant actually was put out by the Sheriff. Starting July 1, 2019, a writ of eviction that is not executed by the Sheriff is vacated. This will let tenants who work things out with their landlord have the writ removed from their tenant record and not be a blemish.

Code of Virginia §§8.01-470 & 8.01-471.

Access to Appeal. Under current law, to appeal an eviction judgment based on nonpayment of rent, the tenant must post an appeal bond for the amount of the money judgment for rent. Tenants also must post an appeal bond for up to 12 months future rent in advance. Usually courts require 3-4 months future rent. All this money must be paid within ten days of judgment. This estimate of future rent which could be due while the appeal is pending is not related to the actual rent due during this period. It is an impossible barrier to a tenant's appeal. Starting July 1, 2019, to appeal an eviction judgment based on nonpayment of rent, the tenant still must post an appeal bond for the amount of the money judgment for rent, within ten days of judgment. But after that, the tenant must only pay ongoing rent as it becomes due.

Code of Virginia §16.1-107.

Additionally, Section 5.-958.4 was amended to allow localities to waive fees for creation of affordable housing for development by for profit developers. Under current law localities can waive fees for non-profit housing developers.

Bills to amend Virginia's fair housing law to add a protection for sexual orientation or gender identity passed the house of delegates, but did not make it out of the senate.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The minutes of the February 6, 2019 meeting were approved as submitted.

OTHER BUSINESS

Elliott Waters brought up the impact of Amazon coming to the area. Ms. Seau discussed the upcoming Apartment Managers Seminar on April 16, 2019 with speakers from JBG SMITH and the Stephen S. Fuller Institute for Research on the Washington Region's Economic Future, The Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.